
To: All Local Authority Chief Executives in England, Wales and Scotland

Date: 05 September 2008

Dear Colleague,

Data sharing between DWP and local authorities for the purpose of administering Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

As you may recall, Government Connect colleagues sent a letter on 7 July 2008 about data-sharing to all Leaders and Chief Executives of local authorities in England and Wales (a copy of this letter can be found at www.govconnect.gov.uk).¹ The letter set out the revision to data access policy for DWP restricted data, and advised that access to DWP data via the internet would cease after 31st March 2009. This means that, after 31st March 2009, it will be possible to access DWP data only over an accredited secure network, with Government Connect Secure Extranet (GCSx) being the Department's preferred method.

The purpose of this letter is to advise you of a number of additional Housing Benefit specific business reasons for requiring live, code of connection compliant, GCSx\GSx connections to be in place prior to 31st March 2009.

From 3rd November 2008, our Housing Benefit Information Flows Programme will be introducing an electronic method of transferring the HB\CTB data gathered by Jobcentre Plus, the Local Authority Input Document (LAID). This is currently delivered by post. The new process will use the GCSx\GSx network to transport the data to the local authorities. We intend to pilot the new method in up to 15 local authorities during November 2008. Assuming all goes well, we will roll-out the new process to the remainder of the authorities between 1st December 2008 and 31st March 2009.

From March/April 2009 this service will be enhanced to include the data collected by the Pensions, Disability and Carers Service on the Local Authority Claim Information (LACI) form and from late 2009, enhanced again to include the data collected during a claim to Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

From April 2009, we plan to replace the current method of exchanging Housing Benefit Matching Service data and the Information Division Scan, which are currently sent by encrypted e-mail, with the same method employed to transfer the claim data from Jobcentre Plus and Pensions, Disability and Carers Service

¹ The majority of Local authorities in Scotland have comparable connections via The Government Secure Extranet (GSx). Local authorities in Scotland who do not have a live GSx code of connection compliant connection will not be able to access DWP data from 1st April 2009 unless an exemption has been agreed with DWP. Details of the exemption process can be found at www.govconnect.gov.uk/implementation/exemption.php.

To enable local authorities to realise the benefits of these initiatives at the earliest opportunity, a roll-out schedule is being developed to enable activity to be co-ordinated across the local authorities, Government Connect and Jobcentre Plus.

If your authority would like to participate in the pilot and you have or expect to have a live, code of connection compliant, GCSx connection by 3rd November 2008 could you please send the following information to the address at the end of this letter:

Local authority name

Contact point within your Authority

Confirm that you have a live, code of connection compliant GCSx\GSx connection.

To help with the planning of the roll-out can you please let me know the date you expect to have a live, code of connection compliant GCSx/GSx connection. If you are not able to meet the 31 March 2009 deadline you must apply for exemption. Details of the exemption process can be found at:

www.govconnect.gov.uk/implementation/exemption.php

I do want to remind you that failure to have either a live connection or an agreed exemption will mean your authority will not be able to access DWP data after 1st April 2009.

Would you please forward responses to the following address by 30th September 2008.

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Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

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